

Carranzistas in Force Fought American Troops at Parral

Advices From Gen. Pershing's Headquarters Contain Unmistakable Evidence De Facto Government Garrison Made Repeated Attacks After Its Commander Had Conferred With Maj. Tompkins.

PERSHING'S CAMP AT FRONT, April 15, via aerolane to Columbus, N. M., April 21.—The fight at Parral, where, according to indisputable evidence reaching here today, Carranza troops in force attacked the cavalry command of Maj. Frank Tompkins, has changed the entire aspect of the Villa chase so far as military plans are concerned. This attack upon an American force which went in perfect good faith into Parral in the most friendly fashion, blocked what seemed to be an excellent opportunity for either the capture of Villa or the dispersal of one of his strongest bands.

Heretofore the American troops have reckoned on meeting opposition from brigands, but resistance from regular armed troops of the Mexican army put the American military leaders immediately under the necessity of preparing for serious difficulties. Whether these preparations will have to be completed depends upon the future course of the Carranza faction. It can be stated that within a few hours after the Parral fight the new disposition of American troops was partly completed and within two days its most important features had been entirely carried out.

On April 12, about noon, Maj. Frank Tompkins of the 13th Cavalry, who chased the Villa band across the international line at Columbus, went into Parral with only a small portion of his force, which totaled about 150 men, including a pack train outfit. He had Troops M and K of the 13th.

Sent Word by Messenger.

Maj. Tompkins had taken the precaution the night before to send word by a messenger to the president of Parral, Luis Herrera, that he would call upon him next day to arrange for buying provisions and to have the Parral military officials designate some camping place for the Americans outside of Parral in accordance with the agreement by which the American troops are not to occupy Mexican cities. Maj. Tompkins left most of his men outside of Parral, but took his advance guard into the city during his call. The presence of this guard was both a military precaution considered necessary in a country credited with being strongly Villista in sentiment and also was the usual formal escort accompanying commanding officers when, according to Mexican custom, they pay official visits.

The president said he had not received the message which Maj. Tompkins had dispatched. The messenger was a Mexican, a Carranza petty officer. After the Parral fight the authorities there claimed they had discovered that this messenger had been captured and killed by Villistas on his way to Parral. The conference in the city with the president and with the Carranza general continued fighting all afternoon and until yesterday, when reinforcements under one of his superior officers arrived to relieve him.

Lieut. J. E. Ord of the 6th Infantry, who accompanied the cavalry expedition, was shot in the left ear, a slight wound.

Attacked While Leaving Town.

When the Americans were out of the town, the pack train at their rear, Maj. Tompkins heard firing. Looking back, he saw that some one in the town was shooting at the pack train. He had heard shouts of "Viva Villa" and "Viva Mexico" and curses against "gringos."

Maj. Tompkins turned to the Carranza leaders and asked them what

they knew about firing on his pack train. Gen. Lozano and the president hurried back toward the town to stop the shooting.

The Americans were in a column formed for defense when this firing began, a formation which Maj. Tompkins had ordered, as he heard the shooting against his pack train, which had been firing six rounds in the rear. Both of the soldiers killed in the action were near Maj. Tompkins.

As the fire became general Maj. Tompkins and the men of his command could see some of their assailants. They wore the khaki uniforms which are customary among the Carranza soldiers. Maj. Tompkins discovered one column of these uniformed men moving out to cut off the road to the east and to the north, where he would have to retreat to escape from the pocket at the camp site. He shouted to these men to get away from the road. When they did not heed his warning the American commander wheeled on his horse and ordered his men to reply to the fire.

Unable to Control Carranzistas.

As the fight began Maj. Tompkins received word from the Carranza general that the civilians were doing the shooting; that his troops were unable to control them, and asking the Americans to fall back. This falling back movement continued for five hours and a half over a distance of fifteen miles on a road bordered by bushes and hills, affording good cover for pursuers. During all this time the American troops repeatedly caught sight of men in Carranza uniforms shooting at them, but saw few, if any, civilians.

After moving out from the trap of hills, where the fight began, Maj. Tompkins formed a line of dismounted men, well spread out, across the road and on adjoining eminences, who retarded the attackers until the pack animals and stores had time to get back toward the American rear.

Repeatedly during the afternoon this defense line continued to form, to fire from the cover of rocks, brush, ground and ditches, and then fell back to their horses for further retreat. The Americans had no machine guns, only their pistols and rifles, and every man was instructed to save his cartridges until he could make them count. During one of these defensive stands Private Herbert Ledford, Troop M, 13th Cavalry, was shot in the hand. He continued to fight. Late in the afternoon, his hand swollen and almost useless, but still fighting, he was shot dead off his horse by a bullet passing through his chest. His body lay in the road, but at all times under cover of such an effective American fire that it was not molesting.

Other Americans Wounded.

The other Americans wounded during the afternoon fight were Corp. Benjamin McGee of the 13th Cavalry, shot in the mouth; Corp. Walter E. Williams, Troop M, 13th Cavalry, shot in the calf of the left leg; Corp. Richard Tammus, Troop K, 13th Cavalry, shot twice in both elbows and one forearm; and Private L. M. Schoenberger, Troop K, 13th Cavalry, who suffered a slight wound in the left hip.

Strategy of the Villa Chase.

The entire strategy of the Villa chase up to its blockade by Carranza forces at Parral is as follows: First was the organization of a secret force at Hachita, N. M., while the main expeditionary body went in via Columbus. Brig. Gen. John J. Pershing and his staff joined this Hachita column at the border by fast automobiles and then led it by unimproved routes at high speed to Casas Grandes.

There, the presence of Villa at San Miguel, about sixty miles southward, was ascertained. Gen. Pershing rushed out three columns to catch him. Poor guides and a railroad accident resulted in the failure of these three iron fingers to close about Villa there. They missed him by barely twenty-four hours.

Next, pursuing columns were sent secretly through mountains to catch him at Namiquipa, about 225 miles below the American border. Villa was warned, and escaped through the mountains to the west.

Many Former Villa Soldiers.

Investigation of the Parral situation showed that while Gen. Lozano himself had no record as a Carranza officer, most of his command was credited with being former Villa soldiers. The city of Parral was known as a hotbed of Villa sympathizers.

The direct effect of the Carranza attack on the Americans was to interrupt the fast pursuit of Villa, which the American command were making with a handful of men. While they were unable to verify the stories that Villa, surrounded and overpowered, was being carried by his men southward past Parral, the knowledge that an important unit of his forces was fleeing southward toward Durango and they were daily nearing this force of bandits and that few civilians participated.

The body of Sgt. Ridgeley was sent into Parral unannounced. The Americans had gone in on what seemed a most reliable invitation from Carranza officers and had certain the message to announce their coming. The president repeated that Parral civilians had been ordered to leave that the people could not be controlled. So far as the actual fighting was concerned, the Americans assert they obtained positive evidence that the Carranza troops were not outnumbered by bandits and that few civilians participated.

AVIATORS COMING BACK FOR NEW AEROPLANES

COLUMBUS, N. M., April 21.—Members of the army Aero Corps attached to the expeditionary force in Mexico have been ordered to the border during the halt in operations, to prepare for service the eight new biplanes expected here. Two of the nine officer aviators attached to the command arrived here yesterday with dispatches, while the remainder and the enlisted men of the squadron are expected to arrive by motor in time to receive the first four planes, expected tomorrow. The first detachment of the 239th troops ordered to Columbus to be held subject to Gen. Pershing's orders arrived from El Paso during the night. It is expected the remainder will arrive today and tomorrow.

Cutting Down Villa's Lead.

Four small columns first entered this chase, one on Villa's heels, starting three days behind and cutting down the lead hourly through terrible mountain passes, while two other columns of cavalry flanked this chase, one east and another west of the Villa trail, to catch him should he deviate in either direction. Col. Dodd meanwhile moved toward the vast mountain ranges in the southwest of Chihuahua to prevent the fugitive from circling back to those almost surely safe refuges. Finally, a few days ago, when it was seen that Maj. Frank Tompkins, leading the chase, directly on Villa's trail, with only 114 men, was heading for the unfriendly Parral country, a fifth column was sent over a direct line to close up on Tompkins' rear.

The long-anticipated break from Carranza forces came at Parral on April 12. Within a few hours after that fight four of the American columns, following the general plan, had joined Tompkins near Santa Cruz, about fifteen miles north of Parral, making a body of troops strong enough for any emergency. Dodd, with the strongest individual column, remained in the west guarding the fastness.

Fifteen hundred men comprised the flying columns when they started from Casas Grandes. A little more than half of them remained at the front of the day of the Parral battle. The others had been dropped through the necessities for food, the deaths of horses and their own semi-kindness, due to the rigors of day and night riding and occasional fighting among jagged mountain rocks, wildernesses of thorns and the bitter snow and cold of the Guerrero region.

PERSHING'S CAMP AT THE FRONT IN MEXICO, April 15, by aerolane to Columbus, N. M., April 21.—After the Parral fight Col. W. C. Brown of the 10th United States Cavalry obtained fairly reliable evidence that Villa, southward toward Durango, was being carried by an escort of 150 men, himself, with an escort of 150 men, was said to have passed through El Valle, a small place about twenty miles west of Parral, bound south. Three miles west of Parral another band of 100 Villa bandits was reported passing south two or three days ahead of the American columns.

Gen. Ismael Lozano, at Parral, said he had engaged this command near Parral, killing forty-two of them. He said he fought them when they were split into three small detachments, defeating each in turn. Gen. Lozano also claimed the presence of American troops near Parral had the effect of increasing Villa's ranks.

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